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A third of frogs in danger of extinction



Dr Indraneil Das

KUCHING: A third of frogs are in danger of going extinct, mostly from human-induced factors, said professor of herpetology Dr Indraneil Das.

However, the amphibians are being discovered faster than scientists can describe them, with 7,044 species (including other amphibians) recorded and new ones emerging every week.

During 'The Amazing World of Frogs' talk held by the Malaysian Nature Society (MNS) Kuching on Tuesday, Das from the Institute of Biodiversity and Environmental Conservation Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (Unimas) said frogs and other amphibians are our window to nature.

"By protecting frogs, we automatically protect nature," he said, adding that frogs need both good forests and clean streams to survive.

He said frogs could potentially hold answers to human ailments.

Das described one genus of frogs where the mother would swallow the fertilised eggs, incubate them in her stomach and regurgitate them as young frogs.

Their ability to halt their digestive process with the eggs could have provided a cure for gastric, he said.

Sadly these particular frogs went extinct shortly after they were described.

While it is a better known fact that male frogs primarily call to attract females, Das said that certain species of frogs also emit a distress call when grabbed.

"Very often, the victim will have no chance of getting away when grabbed, but it will still make noise."

He said that it is possible to tell if there is a snake in the vicinity by the calls made.

"Even if the frog is swallowed by the snake, you can still hear them call from inside the stomach. So what is the function? You have to devote some serious behavioural theories to understand this."

On a lighter note, he said male frogs also have a specific release call they use when grabbed by another male.

He also warned those who come into contact with frogs to wash their hands thoroughly.

"Frogs are full of different chemicals on their skin, and are not to be messed with," he said.

Das said there are over 180 species of frogs in Borneo, based on their limited research and unpublished research.

"Around 110 species were described in Mulu alone," he said, before pointing out that Southeast Asia and South America are hotspots for amphibian research.

Meanwhile, the Bornean Frog Race 2013 will be held on April 27 at Kubah National Park.

Held in celebration of the international 'Save the Frogs Day', the race hopes to raise public awareness of declining populations of frogs and other amphibians. Event general-secretary Pang Sing Tyan said 65 of the 100 spots have been filled.

"Those who do not want to join the race itself can still attend the talks and workshops in the afternoon," she said.

The race will involve participants following designated trails in the national park within two hours to take photographic evidence for the most number of amphibians found, rarest amphibian found, and best amphibian photo taken.

Registration is RM25 for students, RM30 for non-students and RM50 for foreigners.

Participants must bring along their camera with appropriate flash, lenses and download cables.

For more information, go to <http://theborneanfrograce2013.weebly.com> or www.facebook.com/TBFR2013.

Source: The Borneopost